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Bargaining Pace Assailed By Teachers

Montgomery Protest Targets School Board

By Zita Arocha
Washington Post Staff Writer

About 100 Montgomery County teachers gathered yesterday in front of the county school board headquarters to protest what they said was board members' inactivity in salary negotiations.

Mark Simon, president of the Montgomery County Educators' Association, said that the current negotiations with the school board are "a cynical process" that will inevitably lead to an impasse.

"The process outlined by [the school board's] negotiators isn't bargaining," Simon told cheering teachers. "It's an empty ritual carried out by bureaucrats and technicians in which the board abdicates its responsibilities."

He said that because the board's negotiator, and not the board itself, develops counterproposals, "teachers are understandably bitter."

At a meeting earlier in the day, school board members declined to give Simon a chance to speak as part of their regular agenda.

Board President Marilyn Praisner read a statement at the meeting that said, "Public statements by the parties on the positions of the parties are contrary to the spirit of collective bargaining"

The association, which represents about 6,500 teachers, has been meeting with school board representatives for about 10 weeks.

If an agreement has not been reached, an impasse will be declared on Dec. 20 and both sides will submit to binding arbitration. The current contract expires July 1.

Teachers received an across-the-board pay raise of 6 percent this year.

Bruce Goldensohn, who was recently elected to the school board, attended the teachers' meeting and later said: "I think [the association] is sincere in what it wants, but there's no way they could get everything they asked for."

Also, at the school board meeting, Praisner, an analyst with the CIA, was unanimously elected president of the board and Sharon DiFonzo, a community activist, was elected vice president.